

Low Income Families Together

Voices of Poverty

Personal Low Income Tales

Life on Welfare

By Meg

there isn't much they do for you except give you the means to forget you're poor for 48 hours; then you're right back where you started with nothing but six cushions to sleep on and a cardboard box for a bedside table. i wake up in the morning and i know that if i open the fridge, all i'm going to see is my 27-year-old roommates' vinegar bottle jostling for space with the mustard, ketchup, and Metamucil. his clean needles are on the coffee table. i've been living on mr. noodles for two weeks. so i roll myself a cigarette out of the butts in the giant stolen ashtray which is probably the nicest thing in the apartment. is there any money left? i spent it on groceries ' the \$60 i had left ' and my roommates ate everything but the fucking mr. noodles. nobody in my place bothers to change clothes before we go to bed anymore, because we can't afford food and laundry. i smell like two months of cigarettes and three peoples' body odour. anybody want to hire me? i didn't think so. Finishing my cigarette, nobody else is awake yet. the only two bathrooms on my floor are occupied. i go outside in the hall to wait for one to clear out, and notice the stream of water leaking from under one bathroom and under the wall, into my roommates' room. hadn't we complained about that last month? we had after it ruined one of our mattresses' nothing happened. waking jack up to tell him that his bed is being wet by someone's shower waste doesn't have much point. it happens every day anyways it's time to go out and pan for food and smokes. the fourth of April 2002, already i'm back where i started.

I don't really know what the easy solutions to the manifold problems of Social Assistance and Affordable Housing are. The system is dysfunctional, true, but I don't believe that's the fundamental issue. The fundamental issue is that the people who establish the system don't care about those segments of the population the system is put in place to help. We cannot fit people to an inadequate budgeting system. A single mother on welfare needs help, far more than she gets from the government. And our government says it cares about the children. A 19-year-old welfare mother is in many ways still a child. She needs help to finish her education so she can work effectively, but how will she put her child in day care when there are no subsidized day care spots available, and a non-subsidized spot is roughly \$17,000 a year? That's more than welfare GIVES the single mother a year in the first place!

Whose problem is that? According to the welfare offices, the single mother's. Isn't being 19, a mother, living alone and needing an education enough to handle?

Well, no. No, it isn't.

Because the government doesn't need smart people. We might change something unexpectedly if we rose above the subsistence level. And THAT is a governmental concern.